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Christ—Child driven from the door. *Page* 17.

THE

CHRIST-CHILD.

By T. F.,

AUTHOR OF "BETTER THAN DIAMONDS."

NEW YORK:

General Protestant Episcopal S. S. Union and Church Book Society,

762 BROADWAY.

1858.

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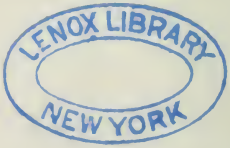

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OF

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

OF

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH,

AUGUSTA, GEORGIA.

THE following narrative is founded upon a German tradition, which the author casually met with, to this effect: That on Christmas day, Christ does, actually, come upon earth, in the form of a little suffering child, to test the hearts of Christian people, and that whoever receives this little child does really and in truth receive Christ, and whoever rejects this little child, does indeed reject Christ.

THE

CHRIST-CHILD.

IT was Christmas morning, but it did not look like it; it did not look as one feels that Christmas should always look, bright and merry; for heavy clouds obscured the sun, and the snow which had fallen during the night, and which still fell at intervals, was dark and discolored with the passing feet.

The wind swept in gusts through the long streets of the city, and was sharp and piercing, so that men who ventured out wore huge overcoats and walked quick, and women were wrapped in furs and great shawls; and little children—for there were plenty of them abroad, it was Christmas, and so they did not mind the dreary weather—had on overshoes, and were all wrapped close in comforters and mufflers. Their faces looked pinched with the keen, raw wind, as they peeped out, but they were bright, and laughed merrily as they turned their backs to the breeze. The shops were gay with toys, and there were bright fires within, making a summer atmosphere. Groups were gathered here and there at some tempting confectioner's window, and now and

then the door would open, and such a savor of hot pies and cakes would come forth, as made the mouth of many a poor little beggar water.

Yes, it was Christmas, and no one heeded the cold, or the snow, or the wind; for hearts were light, and purses were full, and gifts had gone abroad, like messengers, to pave the way and make the donors welcome. Who could care on Christmas day for cold, or rain, or snow? for the joy within made Christians all unmindful of the dreariness without. In the churches were warm stoves, and evergreens, and flowers; and Christian people were there, who would have braved greater things than cold and wind, to show the love they felt for the Babe of Bethlehem.

In rich men's houses were soft carpets, and bright anthracite, and Christmas-trees, and feasts of good things, to which kinsmen and friends were bidden; and in poor men's cottages the doors were shut, and labor was forgotten, and there were huge crackling logs upon the fire, and nuts and apples, and jokes, and mirth, and frolic.

Yes, it was Christmas time, the joyous time, when all—rich and poor, high and low, master and servant—should rejoice together; for to all, equally, this day, had *the Great Salvation* come. So, because it was Christmas time, nobody minded the cold, or the wind, or the snow, nobody but a poor little shivering child without, and nobody minded him. He seemed to belong to no one, to have no

one to care for him. The streets were now full, and people jostled each other on the side-walks, now and then stopping, with a kindly smile and a "Happy Christmas;" but there was no word said to him. He passed on unnoticed.

Fathers were there, with their little children, and they held them tight by the hand, that nothing might hurt them, and pointed out now this, now that pleasant sight, then hurried them on, to house them from the fast-coming storm; but no father held out a hand to him, no one even called him to a shelter. Mothers were there, hurrying fast home, and their arms were filled with toys, and the little child gazed wistfully at the tempting treasures, but not one look was given to him, not one offering made for his ac-

ceptance. He did not belong to the rich, for they care for their own; and besides, his clothing was all too scant, too threadbare. He did not belong to the poor, for there are kind hearts among them, and, surely, by the fire-side of some acquaintance the little wanderer would have been housed and comforted. No, he was all alone; on the wide earth there was not one heart or one home which he could claim—nobody cared for him.

The throng swept on, and he, unheeded by all, went with them; some turned off here, some went on there. He stopped at the open shop-door, where a group went in. He was very cold, and the warm air rushed out against his frozen limbs and comforted them. He was very

hungry, and how delicious was the savory smell! He leaned against the open door, and a man with a great star upon his breast drove him away, and he heard muttered words within of "vagrant" and "thief," and the eating and the drinking went on, and the wine was bright in the cup; but, in the cheerless gloom, in the pelting storm of that Christmas day, the little child wandered on alone.

"Out of the way, child, out of the way! are you crazy?" The words were rough, but the deed which accompanied them, kind; for a strong hand caught him by the arm, and drew him quickly aside, just as a carriage thundered down the street, almost running over him. He looked up gratefully, but the man passed on quickly, with no other heed than "Go

home to your mother, child; no business out in such a storm," and went into the house where the carriage stopped—a beautiful house with marble steps; and then another carriage came, and another, until there seemed no end to them; and richly-dressed people got out, and all went into the house, for it was a rich man's house, and within were bright lights, and bright fires, and bright music, bright flowers, bright faces, and all glittering in the midst the Christmas-tree; and the mother flitted about, and swept around in her rich silk and sparkling jewels, and received her guests gracefully. The father leaned back in his arm-chair and was content. God had prospered him almost beyond his hopes, had blessed him in his basket and in his

store, in his wife and in his children, in his friends and in his business; from poverty he had risen to riches, and in fulness and content his soul was at ease. He looked down his magnificent saloons as his young people, in the pride and strength of their youth, made merry with their friends, and, as the sound of their laughter rang through his great halls, his heart felt glad. He smiled upon his little children, as they danced in their exceeding joy around the beautiful tree, with its thousand tapers and its fairy treasures; and he talked benignantly with the older friends gathered around his hearth, as Christian people should talk, of that day's high festival, of the great congregation, of the rich offering laid upon the altar for the far-off heathen—yes, all was

nice, all was pleasant, all seemed right; and the smell of savory viands came up, and the heart of the rich man grew soft, and seemed to open wide enough to take into its embrace a world of suffering. All seemed right.

Surely, from all this abundance, so freely given to him, a little, a very little, can be spared to the poor, suffering child who stands without at the door. Hark! a knock, low, gentle, unobtrusive; another. The rich man turned his head, and within the door stood the child, wet and shivering, and cold, and naked, and hungry. The yellow hair hung dripping around his pale face, and the blue eyes, in their pleading softness, were wonderfully beautiful. But a moment stood the intruder; an expression of irritation and

disgust passed over the rich man's face, and in an instant the well-trained servant had taken the child by the shoulder, and was turning him from the door. Just then, the wife came forward, her woman's heart was touched, and, "It storms so," she said to her husband in a low tone; "let him go down into the kitchen, until we know something about him. I cannot bear to turn him out."

The reply was almost stern: "My dear, let the servant do his duty."

"Yes," she replied, in a pleading tone, "but——"

"My dear," said the husband, more harshly, "this interference will not answer. Attend to your guests, if you please, and leave me to see to this, or there will be no end to these imperti-

nences." The rest was almost inaudible, "vagrant, beggar, station-house," being the only words which could be heard.

"But," persisted the wife, "you do not know how fearfully it storms."

"My dear," was the imperative reply, "I insist that my order shall be obeyed. The station-house is his proper place."

She ventured no further remonstrance. The little child had been looking earnestly at her, his hands stretched out imploringly: now, they fell listlessly by his side, as he was turned away, the blue eyes filled with tears; and she heard the words, "If thou hadst known—"

With a heavy heart, for the good she could not do, she turned to her husband: an expression of almost terror had crept over his face, as he muttered, "What did

he say? 'How hardly shall a rich man enter the kingdom of Heaven?'" But, in another moment, he had crushed down the little upbraiding voice within, was as bland and as tender-hearted as ever, and the music, and the dancing, and the feast went on; the mirth and the frolic were louder than before. The wind shrieked and howled around the house, but there was warmth, and comfort, and merriment within, nothing but the storm and the cold, and the little wandering child without, on that Christmas day.

Night was coming on, the streets were dark and deserted, for all who could claim a shelter had sought it; even the watchman had taken refuge from the driving rain, under some porch or covered nook, and the child passed on un-

molested. Lights shone from the windows, and, in the pauses of the storm, he could hear the sound of mirth and music from almost every dwelling; for in that street were only the dwellings of the rich.

Now, he would try another. This is less pretending; a court in front, and a porch, from which he can look into the windows. What a home scene of comfort met his eyes! father, mother, and little children; and upon the table lay a Bible—a Bible with pictures, and a little child was looking at the picture of the Nativity there: he is sure of a welcome. Here are Christians. He knocks, this time with more assurance, and a bright-eyed, pleasant-spoken child has opened the door, listens to his few words of en-

treaty for shelter, and with a pitying "Poor little fellow!" went in.

From where he stood, the little shivering child could hear all that was said. "A beggar," said the mother, "a beggar-child! Mercy, there is really no end to them; one has no peace for them. The mother ought really to be ashamed of herself to send him out on such a night as this."

"Oh, but, mother," interrupted the boy, "he is an orphan, and no beggar; he did not beg; he only said something about not having where to lay his head."

"Pooh! nonsense!" said the mother, "the old story; they all say that. I have no place for him. Here, give him this, and tell him there is a boarding-house

around the corner, where he can get a night's lodging," and she held out money to the boy.

"Mother, I can't," said the boy; "I cannot, will not do it. I would not turn a dog out on such a night as this;" and the boy resolutely took his seat at the window, and tried to look out into the dark night.

"Mary, mother," said her husband, half reproachfully, "this is not like you; you will feel sorry for this."

Her cheek flushed: "I am not afraid," was her reply; and, taking up the money, she walked to the door.

"Here," she said, "take this, and go around—" she thought she saw the child standing before her; she placed the money in his hand, as she supposed—it fell to

the ground. · A heavy sigh met her ear, and these words breathed forth: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." She looked out, startled and bewildered, all around; the child was gone. There was no one there, nothing but the dark night, the sharp wind, the pelting rain. She shut the door and returned.

"You have acted hastily, Mary," said her husband.

"Mother," said the little child who was looking at the pictures, "who was it that said, 'He had not where to lay his head?'"

"Mother," cried out the boy from the window, starting up suddenly, "I saw him pass, that beautiful child! and he smiled at me, and held out his hands,

and, O mother!" and his voice sank to a whisper, "there were marks in them."

Yes, he had passed swiftly—that little child—swiftly through the dark street, that dreary, stormy night. Twilight had long since vanished, and darkness, which could almost be felt, had taken its place; the broad street had yielded to a narrower and closer one, where the lamps, at long distances apart, served no purpose to guide the wanderer. He had left the homes of wealth and luxury; he had reached the abodes of poverty; but the storm spares not these. Fiercer and fiercer sweep the gusts through the narrow street, and the snow, which has become rain, pours downwards, as if all the windows of Heaven were opened.

Within one of these small, dark houses sat a woman, all alone; a pale, grave woman. The widow's dress was rusty and worn, as if many days had passed since first it was put on; the bare floor, the single candle, the scanty fire, told a tale of great poverty, but with the poverty was strangely blended an air of refinement and gentleness. She was one whom God loved and was chastening. He was breaking the stony heart and turning out the dross. From wealth He had brought her to poverty, that in Him only she might find her true riches. He had taken from her her husband and her children, and her home and her friends, because she had so loved them as to have forgotten Him, and He would have her all his own. The work was almost

done, and the stony heart had become a heart of flesh.

That Christmas night, memories of the past thronged before her, but no bitterness came with them,—only the heart was lifted up in love, for the great salvation that day sent to all and to her—in love, that God had so loved her, as to pluck her, as it were, a brand from the burning; to have saved her even by His sternest discipline.

Hark! does she not hear a cry? With a half-uttered "God help the homeless!" she rose, and, shading her candle, went to the door; she opened it and looked out, all around, then up into the pitiless sky, and was about returning, when her eye rested on the little child, who had just reached the door, faint and weary,

and almost exhausted with the buffetings of the storm. He fell forward upon the door-step. In an instant she had started forward; with words of tender endearment, "My child! my poor child!" she lifted him in her arms, and carried him into her humble dwelling. By the scant fire she dried the dripping clothes, the streaming hair; she chafed the frozen limbs until life and warmth returned. Her scant morsel of food was brought out for him; and then, folding him in her arms, she soothed him as a mother might her first-born.

Has she fallen asleep? and is she dreaming? Was there but now a storm, and the wind howling around, as she shivered over the dying embers, and a perishing child whom she had warmed

and comforted with her last morsel? Was it all true, or is it indeed a dream? The little child has risen from her embrace, and a halo of light and glory surrounded him. He has stretched forth his hands as if in blessing, and in each tender palm she sees the print of the nails.

With a loud, adoring cry, "My Lord and my God!" she threw herself upon the ground before him, and as he passed away from her sight, she heard, in words like the sweetest music, "Blessed of my Father. For I was an hungered, and ye fed me; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in. My peace I leave you."

Was it a dream? but it is a dream which shall never leave her; she has received the Christ-child, she has received

the Lord Christ himself. Henceforth, through her long pilgrimage, there shall be no more suffering, nor sorrow, nor weariness, nor want. She has received the Saviour to her home and to her heart, henceforth and for ever; the peace of God abideth with her.

She was still kneeling, still gazing up where the child had disappeared, when she was aroused by a knock at her door; another, and the door opened, and some one, wrapped in a cloak, with a dark lantern, entered; and then a cheerful, manly voice exclaimed, "Come, Mrs. Gray, get ready; my wife has sent me for you, and will take no excuse. See," he continued, "she has sent cloak and overshoes—and there is a little lull in the storm, and she says you must come—

she cannot let you stay here all alone and dismal, this Christmas evening. Though," he continued, as the light fell upon her face, "I cannot say you look dismal; your face is as radiant as though you had seen an angel. Any good news?" continued the clergyman, with an expression of wondering admiration as he looked at her.

"Oh, yes," she replied, "oh, yes—something blessed, but very wonderful. I cannot tell it to you here."

"Well, come then," said the good clergyman, "let us go." And carefully wrapping the cloak around her, and throwing the light so as to aid her in walking, he continued, cheerfully, "We have a merry party at home, but you will not mind the noise of children; I think you love them, do you not?"

"I always have loved them," she replied; "but I shall always, after this, love them more than ever."

Not quite understanding this, the clergyman made no reply, and they soon reached the parsonage—the pleasant, quiet parsonage. There was no luxury there, but warm hearts made up the lack; no wealth, but abundant comfort and happiness; and this night—this Christmas night, this happiest night of all the year—was the jubilee to which many a little heart looked eagerly forward:—the parsonage was a home to so many!

As the door opened, the joyous murmur of young voices was heard, and then there was a rush towards the clergyman.

"O papa," exclaimed a bright-eyed

little boy, "come in—make haste; see what we've got. Please make haste, papa."

"What is it, Willy?" said the clergyman, who was assisting Mrs. Gray—"what is it you are so eager about? One would think you had caught St. Claus himself."

"Better, papa," said little Willy—"much better. We have a little orphan child, sir; and when he came he was all cold and wet, and nearly perished; and mamma says I may give him my bow and arrows, and my—"

"O papa," interrupted little Maurice, "he's got such beautiful blue eyes, and such soft, shining hair; and I've brought down my new red shoes for him; and baby will give him her wax doll; and

mamma didn't say so, but I think—I'm not sure, papa—but I think mamma will give him all the money in her purse, to carry him home, because she is so sorry for him, and because he says his home is in a far country; and, papa—"

"O Maurice, let me talk," interrupted Willy, in his turn. "Papa, mamma says I may give him my new clothes, to carry with him; but she says she would rather not take his clothes off now they are dry, sir; because his are such strange clothes. Mamma says she never saw any like them. They have no seam in them, sir."

"Hush, Willy," said the clergyman, a strange feeling of wonder creeping over him. "Where is the child? How did he come here?"

"He knocked at the door, papa; and mamma opened it, and told him to come in. There he is, sir."

And he pointed to the group in the centre of the room.

There, indeed, stood the little child; but how changed in appearance!—no longer pale and wan; the face was now radiant with love and joy, as he looked around on the little children, each proffering some service. Baby's doll was in his arms, and she herself, the little, toddling, wee thing, leaned fondly against his knee. Willy's bow and arrows were at his side, and Willy's new clothes were lying near by; and Maurice's red shoes, and all the toys—the precious toys—of all the little ones around him were heaped at his feet; each had parted with the most valued

Christ—Child received and entertained. *Page* 34.

treasure—each had given freely his best gift to the poor stranger. At the table, close by, the mother prepared a feast of good things for the weary orphan—every now and then drawing near, as if a mesmeric influence were upon her, to gaze lovingly upon the little child.

Mrs. Gray had been forgotten; but she was there, so full of fervent love and adoration, as she recognized the little stranger, that she needed no care: and the good clergyman was there, drawn towards the little child, with a craving, yearning love, for which he could not account.

Little Charley, the bright-eyed boy, who would have taken him in, had come in all unnoticed, and now stood apart, gazing wistfully upon him; and his heart

burned within him with a love which never died out, when the beautiful child, looking fondly upon him, said, "He did what he could."

Yes, all true, loving hearts were there; all willing, all eager to do and to give to the poor stranger,—but, as yet, knowing him only as the poor stranger; all willing, all eager to do and to care for him,—but, as yet, only because they were indeed true disciples of that Master who spent His life doing good. And now that He had been fed, and warmed, and clothed, and comforted, and they were all hanging eagerly about Him, gazing with a wrapt admiration at the beauty which grew more and more radiant as they looked upon it;—drinking in the gracious words which fell from his lips,

and wondering at them with a feeling which deepened into awe, when little Maurice, pointing to the marks impressed upon his hands, asked him what they were; and the answer, slowly and distinctly, fell on every ear:—

"Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."

And then He drew the little children close to Him, and laid His hands upon them, and blessed them; and then spreading out His arms, as if blessing them all, He seemed, as they gazed upon Him, to become fainter and fainter to their sight, yet more and more beautiful—only, as the vision vanished, they could all plainly see the marks in the outspread palms, the crown of thorns, and the halo of glory around the head,—and, like a strain

of dying music, low, yet distinct and sweet, came to every ear and heart the blessed words:—

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

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Rector of the Church of the Ascension, Frankfort, Kentucky.

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their labors were really blended, much better, perhaps, than they themselves when on earth. It is in this admirable spirit that Mr. Norton has worked. Whether, with Seabury, receiving the apostolate on that cold, misty November morning in an upper room at Aberdeen, and laying the apostolic foundation in Connecticut and at our General Convention; or with Moore, in his marked conversion, and his powerful preaching, turning the hearts of hundreds to God, at St. Andrew's and St. Stephen's, and in the length and breadth of the Old Dominion, building up once more into life what had well-nigh crumbled into the dust of death; or with Hobart, fighting the controversial battles of the Church, and, like a wise masterbuilder, laying the foundations of the General Theological Seminary, the Church Book Society, and enlisting the power of the periodical press, guiding the great parish of Trinity Church, and building up his vast diocese during his episcopate of nineteen years to more than *five times* its size when he was consecrated, leaving everywhere the indelible stamp of his own noble character; or with Philander Chase at the North and the South and the East and the far West—in Connecticut, New York, New Orleans, Ohio, Illinois, England, everywhere begging, preaching, building, and leaving monuments of his pioneer labors that shall last to all time, especially as the founder—who else can say the same?—of two *Church Colleges*, both on a firm basis, and both going on from strength to strength; with all these Mr. Norton is equally in love, equally at home, equally interesting to his readers. He has wisely preserved in his pages many of the *piquant* personal anecdotes and pithy sayings, and many of the touches of humor, that warmed the converse of those noble Bishops, and which will endear them still more to the human

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